

Earwax Do's and Don'ts

Good intentions to keep your ears clean may be risking your ability to hear. The ear is a delicate and intricate area, including the skin of the ear canal and the eardrum. Therefore, special care should be given to this part of the body. Start by discontinuing the habit of probing the ears with cotton-tipped swabs or other devices.

Here are some simple Do's and Don'ts regarding earwax and cleaning your ears:

DO

- Understand that earwax is a natural, self-cleaning agent that should not be regularly removed unless it is causing a health problem.
- Use a warm, moist washcloth to clean the outside of your ears, but never insert anything into your ear canal.
- Try placing a few drops of mineral oil, baby oil, glycerin, or commercial drops in the ear to moisten the earwax and let it naturally work its way out of the ear.
- See an otolaryngologist (ENT doctor) if you believe you have discharge, fullness, ear pain, reduced hearing, or other persistent ear symptoms.
- Ask your otolaryngologist about recommended methods of removing excess earwax, which include irrigation (syringing), wax-dissolving eardrops, and manual cleaning with a microscope and specialized instruments.

DON'T

- Never insert anything into your ear canal, regardless of its size or shape. This includes things like cotton-tipped swabs, pens, hair pins, etc.
- Never use an “ear candle” to help remove earwax. An ear candle is a 10” to 15”-long, cone-shaped, hollow candle, typically made of wax-impregnated cloth. Ear candles are proven ineffective for ear wax and may cause burns to the face and hair, obstruction of the ear canal with wax of the candle, or perforation of the membrane that separates the ear canal and the middle ear.
- Do not use any type of irrigation device by yourself. These include items like water picks designed for use in the mouth, or a bulb syringe.
- Don't ignore the following symptoms:
 - Earache, fullness in the ear, or a sensation the ear is plugged
 - Partial hearing loss, which may be progressive
 - Tinnitus, ringing, or noises in the ear
 - Itching, odor, or discharge
 - Coughing

Taking proper care of your ears doesn't mean cleaning them daily. Following a few simple rules will help ensure continued hearing health.

For more information on earwax, or to learn about other ENT health conditions, visit www.entnet.org.

